

REGISTER

Kuebler-Lange Collection, 1895-1996 Bulk, 1932-1976

Size: 2 Manuscript Boxes; 28 folders (2 oversized)
Accession #: 1575

Processed: October 2007
By: Rebecca Parmer

Acquisition: Materials donated to the USS Constitution Museum by Jeanne Kraus, 1997.

Access: Unrestricted.

Copyright: Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with the curatorial staff.

Preface

The mission of the USS Constitution Museum is to collect, preserve, and display objects related to the sailing frigate USS *Constitution*; to teach about her origins, her role in the early republic and her continuing story, and to explore the spirit and ideals of the emerging nation.

The necessary staff for this project was made available through an internship program in cooperation with the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College, Boston MA.

Biographical/Historical Sketch

Louis Edward Kuebler was born on November 12, 1895, in Cook County, Chicago, IL. The fifth child of Minna and Richhard Kuebler (*sic*), both originally of Germany, Kuebler was drafted into the US Army on September 22, 1917. After serving in France with an artillery unit, Private First Class Kuebler obtained an honorable discharge on June 7, 1919 and returned home to Berwyn, Illinois, where he began working for Western Electric making telephone tool parts. His mechanical skill led to a position as a tool-making instructor in Western Electric's Works Training Division, where he trained John Palko, who would eventually join the model-building project.

The Kuebler-Lange model has a lengthy history. Construction on the model began in 1932, when Kuebler and his good friend (and family physician) Dr. William H. Lange read an article advertising a model shipbuilder's contest to be held at Chicago's Century

of Progress International Exhibition in 1933. According to the article, an unnamed Englishman was entering a model of the USS *Constitution*, and Lange and Kuebler, unwilling to let him win, decided to enter a model of their own.

The next two years were spent researching and buying wood, materials, and machines – a slow accumulation, Kuebler states in his monograph, owing to the lean times following the Great Depression. Although the contest was never held, Kuebler and Lange decided to continue their project, and by the end of 1933, Kuebler's friend and former student, John Palko, had signed on to construct the finer metal parts. In November of that year, the hull was completed, and was christened at the Columbus Park Lagoon in Chicago with a specially-constructed, scale model bottle of champagne by Lange's and Kuebler's respective daughters, Dolores and Jeanne Marie.

Work on the model continued in Lange's woodworking workshop until 1942, when the United States entered into World War II and Kuebler and Palko's work at Western Electric turned toward the war effort. The three men resumed work on the model in 1947, and continued until 1949, when Lange died suddenly of a heart attack. In 1950, Kuebler approached Lange's widow for permission to continue work, and when she transferred ownership over to him on October 23, 1950, the model was moved to Kuebler's basement, where it remained until its completion seven years later.

In 1957, after twenty-five years and 62,000 hours (40,000 by Kuebler, 14,000 by Lange, and 8,000 by Palko), the model was finally completed. A perfect 1:24 scale, the model measured in at twelve-and-a-half feet from bow to stern, and eleven-and-a-half feet from the bottom of the hull to the top of the tallest mast. Constructed of thirteen different kinds of wood, including redwood, oak, and mahogany, seven different metals, including copper sheeting from Boston's Paul Revere firm (provider of the copper sheeting on the hull of the original ship), and hand-stitched Irish flax, it was insured for \$100,000 in 1957.

Kuebler spent the next decade exhibiting the model locally while attempting to find a buyer who could give the model a suitable home. Though he had correspondence with the Smithsonian, the United States Naval Academy, and a bevy of other places, his attempts proved fruitless until 1975, when Alf McConnell, then of Chicago's Continental Bank, purchased the model for one million dollars and displayed it in a series of Bicentennial exhibitions throughout 1976. The model was then placed into storage until 1987, where it was brought out and displayed in the lobby of an office building McConnell constructed in Oak Brook Terrace until 1996. The model was donated to the USS *Constitution* Museum in 1996, where it remains on permanent display.

Scope and Content

The Kuebler-Lange Collection consists of the research notes, drawings and sketches, plans and prints, correspondence, publicity, photographs, slides, and newspaper and magazine articles relating to Louis Kuebler's and William Lange's model of the USS *Constitution*. The collection is contained in two archival manuscript boxes, and is divided into five series containing twenty-eight folders: one of biographical information, twelve containing model papers, eight with publicity, five of photographs and slides, and two containing Kuebler's scrapbook (one with the actual scrapbook and one with a digitized version on a compact disc).

This collection was donated by Kuebler's daughter, Jeanne Kraus, in 1997, and largely retains the same order in which it came. Items are arranged chronologically within the initial subject divisions, although due to the varying media of this collection, some items have been removed for proper storage.

Two name plates and a metal-cutting guide used on some of the model's intricate scrollwork have been placed into the Museum's Collections department, alongside the paraphernalia that originally arrived with the model. A set of rolled photographic proofs from the March 1957 cover of *Popular Mechanics* has been flattened and placed into an oversized folder (Folder 17, Acc. #1575), and a set of model plans and prints has been removed and laid flat in an oversized folder as well (Folder 9, Acc. #1575). Finally, due to the delicate nature of Kuebler's scrapbook, a digital version has been created and burned onto a compact disc for researcher use. Researchers desiring to use the actual scrapbook may do so at the discretion of the curatorial staff.

Series List

I.	Biographical Information, 1895-1996	Box 1, Folder 1
II.	Model Papers, 1932-1976	Box 1, Folders 2-13
III.	Publicity, 1932-1976; 1996	Box 2, Folders 14-21
IV.	Photographs and Slides, 1932-1976	Box 2, Folders 22-26
V.	Scrapbook (undated)	Box 2, Folders 27-28

Series Descriptions

Series I: Biographical Information

Included in one folder is biographical information on Louis Kuebler, including copies of his birth and death certificates, service records for his time spent in the United States Army, and his obituary (as well as those for his wife and son, a number of years later).

Box 1, Folder 1

Series II: Model Papers

This series consists of the research notes, correspondence, plans, aids, drawings and sketches, plans and prints, and cost-related materials pertaining to the Kuebler-Lange model. One oversized folder is housed separately from this collection, and contains large prints and detailed sketches. Also included is an undated monograph written by Kuebler that details his motivations for building the model as well as a discussion of the work that went into it. Finally, one folder contains a certificate awarding the model an honorary position in the U.S. Navy Great Lakes fleet.

Box 1, Folders 2-13

Series III: Publicity

Contained in this series is the publicity the Kuebler-Lange model garnered over the course of its twenty-five year construction, including newspaper articles from a number of Chicago-based papers, articles and covers from Western Electric's company magazine *WE* and a March 1957 issue of *Popular Mechanics*, and nearly two decades-worth of solicitation from Kuebler to a variety of institutions he thought would be suitable places to house the finished product.

Box 2, Folders 14-21

Series IV: Photographs and Slides

Five folders contain photographs and slides of the model, Kuebler and the model, Kuebler's basement workshop, and details of the actual ship, taken on a research sojourn to Boston by Kuebler and his wife, Cecilia, in 1950.

Box 2, Folders 22-26

Series V: Scrapbook

The last series contains Kuebler's scrapbook, which contains photographs, newspaper clippings concerning the model as well as the actual ship, and postcards showing details of the USS *Constitution*. Due to the fragile nature of this item, a second folder containing a digitized version of the scrapbook on a compact disc for researcher use has been included.

Box 2, Folders 27-28